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World terrorism seen getting bloodier

By Tom Diaz
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International terrorism has moved into a new and bloody stage of government-supported violence, experts told a rare joint session of the Senate Foreign Relations and Judiciary committees yesterday.

Terrorism is "becoming bloodier" with a "growing number of large-scale indiscriminate acts," said Brian M. Jenkins, a RAND Corporation analyst.

But the witnesses charged that negative reporting of U.S. counter-terrorist activities by the news media, government ineptitude and congressional indifference are hampering an effective U.S. response to the problem.

"Americans have been spoon-fed the idea of an instant solution using the Marquis of Queensbury rules," said Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., on the first of three days of joint hearings.

But instead of such "instant solutions," the experts testified, the United States needs to develop more understanding among its citizens of the threat that international terrorism poses, and a "national will" to use force when necessary to head off terrorist violence.

Sen. Jeremiah Denton, R-Ala., criticized the news media several times during the hearing, saying it "steps in with lots of criticism" about U.S. setbacks in combating terrorism and, as a result, "minor losses or temporary battle losses turn into defeat."

He said the terrorists who blew up the Marine barracks in Lebanon "should have worried about what the United States would do in retaliation," but charged that "the media and the Congress" in effect sent a signal to the terrorists and "told them we would withdraw" if confronted with violence.

Several witnesses complained that responsibility for counter-terrorism is too widely dispersed among different agencies in the U.S. government, with everybody grabbing for a piece of the bureaucratic pie.

"We simply have got to get rid of this 'terrorist chic' in this country ... where every bureaucrat sees it as an empire," said Nathan Adams, a senior editor at The Readers Digest.

Mr. Adams has investigated state-sponsored terrorism for the magazine over the last several years. He said he realized some journalists would disapprove of his appearing as a witness before a congressional committee.

But, he said, "I'm a human being and I'm very concerned about it. I can't simply wash my hands of it."

The hearings disclosed several eye-opening incidents, one of which

was a claim by Sen. Denton that he was approached last month in Taiwan by a man who offered him several hundred thousand dollars to "promote" Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi in the United States.

Another was a witness' claim that the United States "effectively had a protection racket going" in Beirut, relying on the Palestine Liberation Organization to protect its embassy there.

Former CIA deputy director Ray S. Cline, a fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies told the panel that violence supported by governments such as Iran and Libya is "the most common kind of terrorism" today.

He called Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini "a wild card in the terrorist deck," and said Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi is "another wild card player ... playing with Soviet weapons."

Mr. Cline emphasized the "far-ranging strategic consequences" of state-sponsored terrorism. It would be "foolish" to blame the Soviet Union for all of the terrorism in the world, he said. But, he added, he would blame the Soviets and their "client states" for creating an "infrastructure" for terrorism and "a system of exporting terrorism," based on "finding grievances in parts of the world where it benefits the Soviet Union."

Mr. Cline's charge of Soviet support for terrorism against Western interests sparked a sharp exchange with Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I.

Sen. Pell — one of two Democrats who made brief appearances at the

hearings — repeatedly pressed Mr. Cline for a "specific example" of "direct evidence linking the Soviet Union to a specific case" of terrorism within the last year. The senator expressed dissatisfaction with Mr. Cline's reference to "circumstantial evidence" linking Soviet arms and other support to groups that have acted against U.S. interests in the Middle East.

"You're being like the [news] media, looking for a smoking gun," said Mr. Cline.

"I am," agreed Sen. Pell.

"You want someone who is killed by a terrorist with a Soviet order in hand," continued Mr. Cline. "But when an assassination team is sent out, it does not get written orders," Mr. Pell.

Later in the hearing, Mr. Adams

told Sen. Pell that he could cite a "specific example" of Soviet involvement in terrorism during 1983.

He said Lebanese terrorists from the Be'kaa Valley area were taken to a meeting in Bulgaria in September 1983 that was coordinated by the Bulgarians and East German advisers.

"I don't know whether that counts as Soviet support," he said. "But the meeting was certainly in Bulgaria, which is a Soviet vassal."

Another witness, Martin Sicker, director of the Center for International Security in Washington, said it is "almost impossible to draw an actual connection" between the Soviet Union and terrorist activity, but "the coincidence is overwhelming."